

A WEEK IN *Learning*

What's Follow-Up Got to do with It?

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Follow-up: a word that can mean so many different things to many different people. It is so much more than sending an email response, returning someone's phone call, or saying, "Yeah, I got it." It's a way to stay connected, build trust, and keep everyone on the same page. Follow up, to me, means I've done my part on what I was assigned, or asked, to do to the best of my ability. It helps me understand what is going on, what I am responsible for, and how to prioritize my time and resources properly. It is not surprising that some people consider follow-up to be a courtesy, something that isn't very important because it is just a 'good manner'. However, follow-up is a vital part in our work and personal life, and has many benefits.

From a learning and development perspective, it is great to teach someone a new skill or concept, but how are we going to know if that person has effectively absorbed and applied the information? The majority of what we learn is truly tested when we go to perform that new task or concept, or even teach someone else it. Follow-up, then, becomes a large part of reinforcement and continued learning, which can help in developing our team members. This is not only a part of our learning and development team, but it is highlighted across all departments.

No matter where you work, follow-up has a great deal of benefits. It can help you build trust with your customers and team, track milestones or key dates, and keep everyone accountable. With follow-up, team members know where they stand and how they are performing. This information can also help motivate positive behavior change, which can lead to increased job satisfaction and higher productivity. Aspects of your life outside of work can be positively impacted by follow-up as well. Personal relationships, health and wellness, and financial matters are just three examples.

There are also downfalls when there is a lack of follow-up. When we look at all the projects and tasks on our plates at work, it can be overwhelming and confusing when 'next steps' are not followed-up, which can then cause delays, disappointments, a loss of investment, or reverting to old patterns of behavior.



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A lack of follow-up can also damage your personal relationships. For example, your interactions could be perceived as not genuine, one of the parties could feel unvalued, or that they are not worth following up with.

Even with the multiple benefits follow-up provides, it does have its limitations – I'll be the first to admit it! After recently purchasing a new house, during the inspection period, a general inspector told us there were issues that had to be further looked into by other contractors. One major issue was for plumbing, so we called a plumbing company to find out how large the problem really was. Within two days after inspection, I received 4 phone calls, three of which included voicemails and 2 outrageous quotes. This, of course, was too much follow-up and came across pushy and overly persistent. However, there are some ways you can improve your follow-up, as well as applying it in the right situations. For example:

- Be proactive
- Set reminders
- Be nice and polite – watch your tone
- Give yourself, or others, time to respond – set expectations on timing; if you need an answer quickly, tell them and be clear
- If you follow-up several times and do not get a response, ask the person directly if you should stop checking in
- Find out how others like to communicate (some prefer email, where others like face to face)
- See if contacting them at another time works better with their schedule

Remember, it's important to find a good balance that fits each situation. Do not just set expectations in regards to follow up, but strive to meet or exceed them! I know what some of you are thinking: please tell me more about this topic. However, all good things must come to an end. I hope I've inspired or made you think about this topic more. Ask yourself, who do I need to follow up with today?

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